

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

143

in dances. In front of most houses rises a short totem-pole,³⁴² either pierced for the doorway, or standing on the opposite side of the sidewalk. [211] [778]

THE FAMILY

It is probably no exaggeration to say that in every part of the world the most important social unit is the family. It certainly is among the Bella Coola, yet its lack of definite social obligations makes it difficult to define. Reduced to minimum size, the family consists of a man, his wife, or wives, and his children. Such a unit occupies one of the bedrooms of a large house, and it is to such a family that an infant automatically belongs at birth. Disregarding for the moment ceremonial obligations, which are shared by others, it is the father and mother who are responsible largely for the upbringing of the child. Such education as he receives comes from them, with the assistance of members of the ancestral family. This is chiefly imitative; a boy, as he increases in strength, follows his father on hunting expeditions or fishing. The mother teaches her daughters how to make baskets, and they follow her when she gathers berries, or when she cooks and performs household duties. The Bella Coola are fond of children, in many cases to the extent of over-indulging them, and they grow up amid the open life of the large houses, absorbing information of all kinds without being aware of so doing. [594] [851] [594] [868] [855] [861]

Only two kinds of functional training need be mentioned. A wise father carefully trains his sons to remember their debts (I, p. 369), and the method of teaching ancient myths has already been described; otherwise there is little direct instruction. On the other hand, parents devote great care to furnishing their children with every possible means of strengthening their supernatural elements on which success depends. These can [594] [869]

Since the Bella Coola believe that totem-poles were used by their ancestors in early times, they are included in this description of a village, without reference to their development in post-European times. This account is compiled from descriptions given by elderly informants; it is inevitable, therefore, that changes due to European contact may be included. [777]

BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE

367

before their birth. When the mother of the twin described in the last paragraph was awaiting delivery in a temporary shelter in the woods, its roof fell, cutting her head. The old woman who mentioned this occurrence stated that both her grandmother, the Sockeye Salmon, and her sister, a Spring Salmon, though still unborn, were aware of the accident and remembered the comments of the midwife. 845

On account of their uncanny power, twins are considered weaklings and usually die young in spite of the care lavished upon them and the taboos observed by their parents.² A dead twin, instead of being buried, is put in a box which is placed in a tree far away from the village. Every year the river changes its course, eating into its banks in order to reach the tree containing the body, and this continues until it reaches its goal and sweeps away tree and coffin. 766 [823]

CHILDHOOD INSTRUCTION

When working in the field, an anthropologist almost inevitably concentrates upon ceremonials and other epochs in an individual's life, to the detriment of the daily routine which in Bella Coola, as everywhere else, is fundamentally important although it defies description on account of its intangibility. A child grows up in a large house, occupied by several families, in which there is little privacy. The parents provide food and clothing, but more distant relatives take a greater share of responsibility for this than do white people. When food is being given out, a child soon learns that he will be given some of it, and that he will have his portion in any distribution of presents. Furniture, bedding, and other necessities are reduced to a minimum, but a boy or girl is welcome to sleep with relatives should his own parents wish to go hunting or fishing. The sense of power possessed by a Bella Coola with many relations is largely intangible, but it has practical applications as 114 855 • [867] [867]

²It is probable that the arduous life led by a twin and its parents during the first year after birth lessens its chances of survival. Needless to say, this explanation does not find favour with the Bella Coola.

855 well, and these are soon learnt by the child who is fortunate
 [867] enough to have many kinsmen. Primarily, responsibility rests
 with the parents for the care and support of their offspring, but
 they have the advice, assistance, and material aid of their
 relatives. Nor are these limited to the near kindred of either
 father or mother; all members of the ancestral family take
 their part. Housemates, also, even if unrelated, take an in-
 terest in any child who shares their habitation, irrespective of
 his rank.

868 Much of the care bestowed on children is of a magical
 nature and must be reserved until a later chapter. Little boys
 follow their fathers on hunting expeditions and so acquire knowl-
 edge by practical experience, as do girls from their mothers
 with regard to household tasks and feminine occupations.
 867 Even small children are quick to notice the attention paid to
 the orders of chiefs, and carry out their commands without
 demur. A disobedient child is beaten or thrown into cold
 861 water; the parents usually act in such cases, though a hear
 relative does not hesitate to do so, especially if he is a chief.

857 Like all other children, Bella Coola boys and girls are fond of
 stories and listen eagerly to the tales told in the long evenings
 867 by some old man or woman. Many of these are somewhat
 538 obscene, but they serve to teach much ancient lore, and at the
 same time to emphasize many taboos and restrictions which
 are thus assimilated without definite schooling. They illus-

[626] trate the laws of morality, as does the public disapproval shown
 to anyone who infringes some point of etiquette or behaviour.

[825] If a child makes fun of a cat-fish or a bull-head, he is not told
 to stop doing so; instead, one of his elders tells him how, in the
 distant past, there was a famine, and advises him not to scoff
 at the fish which alone saved his ancestors from starvation at
 that time. If a rude little boy laughs at a maimed or deformed
 [732] man, he is told of *Atalals*, a Bella Bella urchin who repeatedly
 mocked a one-eyed man and presently, himself, lost the sight
 of an eye.

867 "Don't laugh at cripples, blind people, or those who are
 [735]

BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE

399

thus boast that she has three sets of teeth, but as the practice has not found favour in Bella Coola, it is little to her advantage.* 585
[177]

These complicated marriage rites are necessary to satisfy the pride of the two families in their origin myths, and the need to establish the resultant children in the paths of their ancestors. Among slaves or others who lack ancestral prerogatives, marriage is an affair of slight worth. Such persons simply live together with little ceremony, though they always try to give at least a feast so that there may be witnesses of the transaction. It is immaterial whether or not they marry their own relatives, since no ancestral prerogatives are to be transmitted. [556]
[567]
[581]

MARRIED LIFE

Y usually lives in the house of X's father, though economic circumstances may compel her husband to live in her home. If the parents are very wealthy, a house may be built for the young people, but usually their home is one of the bedrooms in the house of X's father; this patrilocal residence exposes Y not only to good advice from her mother-in-law, but often to caustic criticism. The married life of X and Y does not differ materially from that of other young couples in any part of the world, and is accordingly difficult to describe. Although love rarely enters into the original choice of a mate, a serviceable substitute is found in the mutual respect for each other's ancestry, and the knowledge of the importance of the rites performed with the aid of each other's elderly relatives. The young people realize that marriage affects the families of both, and accordingly accept it as a matter of course. The Bella Coola are fond of children. Their birth is a matter of sincere rejoicing, partly because it binds the two families more closely together, but parental affection is one of the strongest Bella Coola characteristics. The parents usually spoil their children; infants, especially, are never chastised and rarely 591
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[861]

*The board used on this occasion was purchased for the National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

855 rebuked. They grow up in the open environment of the
 [861] houses, absorbing more of their lore by watching and imitat-
 [854] ing than by actual instruction. Their care devolves chiefly
 on the mother, although at any ceremony the father will be
 seen arriving with the baby in his arms, while his wife leads
 another child. Nurses are unknown and the parents take
 their children with them on all occasions; if it is necessary
 for a mother to be absent on some arduous toil, her child will
 be entrusted to a grandmother or other elderly relative.
 There are no avoidances between the young people and their
 606 parents-in-law.

602 The obligation of present-giving does not stop with the
 431 marriage ceremony. Whenever X gives a *kusiut* dance or other
 ceremony, Y's relatives are expected to contribute. It is felt
 that the weight of the presents given them during the period
 of engagement and at the wedding has become too heavy, and
 they throw this off by lavish giving. No count is kept of the
 value of gifts bestowed or received, though it is known that
 the family of the woman lose financially in the end. The father
 of many daughters is regarded as an unfortunate individual,
 [554] who is always poor and overworked through the necessity of
 providing for them. By sodoing, however, he increases his
 own prestige, and the Bella Coola have the happy sentiment
 that such a man manages to get along some way; perhaps
 necessity rouses his ambition. Likewise X's relatives contri-
 bute to any ritual carried out by Y's father. If, for example,
 one of his wife's relatives dies, X and his friends may wish to
 contribute towards the funeral expenses. In fact, any cere-
 [556] monial serves as an excuse for relatives by marriage to donate
 goods and thus demonstrate publicly their influence, impor-
 tance, and generosity.

602 The concept of mutual help between families who have
 476 intermarried is one that lasts for generations. In 1922 there
 was in Bella Coola an old Kimsquit man who had left home
 some forty years earlier and had since lived in Smith Inlet
 where he married and had a boy. On the death of his wife, this